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MEMORIAL ADDRESS.

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

JOHN J. FRAY, A. M.,

FIRST PRESIDENT NORTH CAROLINA TEACHERS' ASSEMBLY.

BY PROF. HENRY LOUIS SMITH.

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IN MEMORIAM.

JOHN J. FRAY,

FIRST PRESIDENT NORTH CAROLINA TEACHERS' ASSEMBLY.

HIS LIFE AND SERVICES.

EULOGY BY PROFESSOR HENRY LOUIS SMITH. DELIVERED AT THE TEACHERS' ASSEMBLY AT BLACK MOUNTAIN, JUNE, 1885.

How many pleasant memories of the first meeting of our Assembly waken in our hearts as we look upon this throng of familiar faces! Which of us, as pictures of those happy days rise before his mind, can believe that a whole year has passed away since we met among the mountains of Haywood county! Once more we feel the cordial grasp of friendly hands; again we hear the well-remembered tones of familiar voices; now, as then, the green hills of our native land stand sentinel round us, and the untrodden forests rest upon them like the shadow of God; the same life-giving mountain air sweeps through the "Land of the Sky"; the clouds are once more drifting with wings outspread from mountain peak to mountain peak to meet their climbing shadows; the same blue heavens bend over us as of old, and

> "Naught can be so sweet to see,
> As old friends meet together."

But alas! death has been busy in our ranks:—our eyes seek in vain for one honored form, we miss the grasp of one dear hand, we fail to hear the tones of one familiar voice!

> "Leaves have their time to fall,
> And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
> And stars to set—but all—
> Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!
>
> We know when moons shall wane,
> When summer-birds from far shall cross the sea,
> When autumn's hues shall tinge the golden grain—
> But who shall teach us when to look for thee!"

B.M.
8 N'00.

Our ship had barely cleared the harbor and moved out on her course across the sea, when the pilot was stricken at the helm and called to that far-off shore where tempests never blow. That clear, ringing voice, so outspoken in its condemnation of what is wrong, so fearless in manly scorn of what is base and low, so true in defence of what is noble and pure, so gentle and tender in tones of sympathy and love, that voice that guided our deliberations and so often made clear the path of duty, is hushed in the cold stillness of the grave! The green turf of his loved Virginia covers that manly form which stood preëminent in our counsels one year ago. The winter rains and snows have fallen upon the cold earth that shrouds his clay: the sunshine and awakening beauty of spring have decorated that sacred mound with vernal freshness; but naught can waken *him* from his silent slumber. In the strong arms of immortal love, he sleeps the sleep of the just.

We have gathered together as an Assembly to do honor to the memory of our first President, and testify to the irreparable loss we have sustained in his death, to sorrow at the grave of buried friendships, and lay our wreath of laurel and tribute flowers on the green turf that wraps his clay.

The story of his life is a shining record of arduous duties well and faithfully performed, of difficulties met and overcome by strength of will and indomitable energy, of uncompromising truth and honor in all transactions with his fellowmen, and unfaltering loyalty to the Saviour to whose service he so early consecrated his life and powers.

Born in Madison county, Va., on the 23d of May, 1840, he was distinguished even when a child for his studious habits, his piety, and quick and vigorous mind. At the early age of sixteen he entered the University of Virginia. When his college days, spent in diligent and successful study, were over, he chose teaching as his profession, and to this ennobling avocation, so dear to his heart, devoted all his rare powers of mind and unconquerable energy. While thus engaged at Memphis, Tenn., the clouds of war, which had so long hung low and threatening on the horizon,

broke in darkness and tempest over the fair land of his birth. When his country called him to defend what he believed to be her sacred rights from invasion, he left the quiet work of the school-room for the shock of battle, and with characteristic energy threw himself into the heart of the conflict. Even among the dashing cavalrymen of the ubiquitous Mosby, he was conspicuous for his gallantry and daring, and was often chosen by his leader for special services requiring the utmost coolness and judgment joined with the most intrepid courage.

When those four long years of blood and tears were over, and the sun of the Confederacy went down on the field of Appomattox, he acquiesced with manly courage in the fate of the cause for which he had so long and bravely fought, and moving to Wake county, N. C., resumed his chosen vocation.

In 1868 he was married to Miss Bettie Wayland, of Culpepper county, Va. In 1877 he moved to Raleigh and, in the following year, formed a copartnership with Prof. Hugh Morson in the management of the Raleigh Male Academy. The school grew with unexampled rapidity, and soon became one of the most prominent schools of its class in that part of the State. But exposure during the war, added to years of incessant toil and confinement in the school-room, had fatally undermined his health. At the meeting of the Assembly last summer, over which he was so unanimously called to preside, the encroachments of disease were already painfully evident to his various friends. After leaving Waynesville, his strength rapidly failed. In the fall, although his health was completely shattered, he returned to the school-room, in which the best years of his life had been spent, and struggled with characteristic energy against physical weakness and bodily suffering. But neither firm determination and strength of will, nor the efforts of skilled physicians, nor the sympathy and prayers of hosts of friends, could stay the progress of the destroyer. The few remaining weeks of his life were spent in the calm contemplation of approaching death, and daily communion with the Redeemer on whose atonement he rested his hopes of a blissful immortality. On the 23d of December, 1884,

just 16 years after his happy marriage, his ransomed spirit burst its fetters of clay and soared beyond the reach of pain and weakness into the sunlight and joy of the presence of God. With sorrowing hearts and loving hands his Masonic brethren bore his body to his Virginia home, and, with many tears, committed it to the grave in the confident hope of a glorious resurrection.

What solemn thoughts crowd upon us as we think of that new-made mound which rises above the hallowed dust of him we loved so well! One year ago—and now! What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue! The fickle winds, the gleam of sunset clouds, the arrow speeding to the mark, the film of vapor disappearing in the sky, are fitting types of this transient life of ours. Time—vast, silent, swift, all-embracing—hurries us onward in its fleet career. Its great bell swinging between earth and sky, tolls the funeral knell of our departing years. One by one the solemn strokes ring out upon the air. The echoes float to our ears for a while, in sadly sweet reverberations; then, with ever softening cadence, die away into the unfathomable abyss of the past.

One by one our departing years, some shining with dazzling lustre, some clothed in darkest gloom, slip into the rushing current, and are borne away. With straining eyes we strive to follow their retreating forms, till mingling with the indistinguishable throng of our receding years, they vanish from our aching sight. Soon the last one, gliding out upon the mysterious current, will float away beyond our reach, and through the shades of death we will follow it into eternity. But to the eye of Christian faith a "light that never shone on sea or land irradiates the darkness of the tomb." The grave with its darkness and shadowy spectres of the night, is yet the portal that opens into eternal sunshine. The harsh grating of its iron hinges frights the world, but beyond we can see the white-robed thousands throng the empyrean and hear the triumphant songs of the redeemed. From those ineffable heights come the voices of the loved ones who have gone before, calling us upward, and listening, we forget the dark valley with its shadowy portal, we hear the twelvefold chorus of

the ransomed rolling its mighty harmonies through the arches of heaven and long for that abode of perfect rest and triumphant joy. In the full assurance of this blessed hope, trusting in Him who burst the bars of death and robbed the grave of its gloom, our dear friend passed away. An earnest belief in a personal God and faith in a personal Saviour were the foundation of his character. The word of God was his constant study and the sheet-anchor of his hopes. Each morning and evening he perused its sacred pages. From them he learned how to live a Christian life and die a Christian death.

We turn from his grave with saddened hearts and tear-dimmed eyes, but we need not weep for him. Free at last from the touch of wasting disease, free from the toils and cares of earthly life, free from the imperfection of human nature and the restraints of a material existence, his immortal soul has really just begun to live. It has now found room for the expansion of all its God-given powers, and in the presence of God, and the companionship of all that is noble and pure, presses forward free and unincumbered in its immortal career. On the "far green hills of God," his sanctified spirit walks amid the throng of the redeemed.

Death was no surprise to him. For months he could trace its gradual approach and see its shadow deepening round him. Steadily day by day the fell hand of disease fastened more closely on his frame. Steadily, day by day, he could feel himself losing his hold on life, and borne with accelerating rapidity toward the grave. It is hard at any time to contemplate the near approach of death, unmoved. But in the full maturity of one's powers, in the prime of noble, honored, happy manhood, in the meridian of usefulness and ever-widening influence, blessed with a loving family and a long retinue of affectionate friends, *then*—nothing but the grace of God and the power of His might can sustain the soul in that dark hour when one by one these threefold cords are torn asunder. Such grace was given to our departed friend. For him the dread unknown was no longer haunted with fearful spectres of the night. The Cross of Christ had conquered death and thrown a flood of celestial radiance along the path by which

the soul returns to the God who gave it. Such was faith and firm support in the hour of dissolution. God grant it may be ours! Without it, Death is indeed the king of terrors, the shadow of whose wings may well paralyze the proudest and bravest heart with deadly fear.

This spirituality and triumphant Christian faith formed the broad foundation from which arose a character lofty, symmetrical and spotless as a temple of marble. His religious zeal never degenerated into narrow sectarianism. He was one of the very few who can see both sides of a question, who can recognize good in an opponent, who really feel in their hearts that the adherents to a different creed have a right to form their own opinions. Such men and women are sadly in the minority. The age of the fagot and the stake has perished, we trust forever, but the age of true toleration and brotherly feeling among those who differ in religious opinions is still in the far distant future. How many there are in this land of enlightenment and christianity who think that the great Invisible God has revealed Himself in all his glory to their own particular sect or denomination; that they alone read His wonderful word aright, and all the world beside stumbles in darkness and sees not the meaning of the revelation; who have been reared in such prison-cells of prejudice and partisan zeal that they cannot rend the shackles to which their arms have grown fast. In his freedom from religious intolerance and narrow-minded denominationalism, in his broad sympathy and love for all, he, though dead, yet speaks, and teaches a noble lesson which many are slow to learn. As a friend and neighbor, his unfailing cheerfulness and winning courtesy endeared him to all. He was that noblest of our civilization and christianity, a Christian gentleman in thought, word and deed. No action of his ever belied his words. He was the soul of truth and uprightness. Open, frank, candid in speech and action, he scorned hypocrisy and dissimulation.

His whole life was a protest against duplicity in every form. This manly candor and perfect frankness was apparent to the most casual acquaintance. It shone in every lineament of his

countenance and spoke in every tone of his voice. One felt instinctively that here was no lurking place for cant, deceit, or double-mindedness. Such qualities felt rebuked and abashed in his presence and gave place to nobler things. But it was in his chosen vocation that the strength and symmetry of his character were most conspicuously displayed. He possessed in a remarkable degree a faculty which eminently fitted him to be a leader and controller of young and immature minds. No man without it has ever exerted a great or lasting influence on his fellowmen, or stamped his character and opinions on the mind of the world. I allude to what psychologists call will-power, that energy of spirit and persistence of action which clings to a given purpose in spite of opposition or threatened failure, which triumphs over physical weakness and unfavorable circumstances, which wrests victory from apparent defeat, and compels the minds of men to yield instinctive homage and fealty to its possessor. This overmastering force of will was one of Capt. Fray's distinguishing characteristics, and contributed very largely to his unusual success in his arduous profession.

He never fainted nor grew weary in his noble vocation. No murmuring against the so-called "hardness of the teacher's lot" ever fell from his lips. With loyal constancy to his work, with bright unflagging zeal, with unfaltering courage, and contagious enthusiasm, he pressed onward in the path of usefulness. On the advancement of his pupils in everything that constitutes true and noble manhood, he concentrated all his thought and care. No sacrifice of time and ease was too great, no labor too arduous, for the accomplishment of this high purpose. His love for his pupils and interest in their progress permeated his whole nature, and was visible to the most casual observer. Though a strict disciplinarian, he was never harsh and cold. His pupils looked to him as a valued counselor and friend. They came to him with their troubles and doubts, sure always of a sympathetic hearer and the kind advice of a loving guide.

No wonder that when his soul was burning with enthusiastic love of knowledge and virtue, his pupils caught the flame. He

believed that in the heart of every man lie sleeping at least the germs of noble impulses and noble deeds, ideas of truth and duty, aspirations after purity and holiness, longings for something higher and better than the past has offered. To stir these dormant impulses into vigorous, fruitful growth, to waken into activity the higher part of the soul, to rend from the mind the shackles of ignorance and prejudice and teach it to look with ever-broadening sympathy and love on all mankind—these were the objects for whose attainment our friend spent his time, his powers, his youth and noble manhood. For these high ends he sacrificed worldly ease and pleasure, for these he "scorned delights and lived laborious days," and even when coming death had cast its lengthening shadows, broad and deep before his feet, and set its unmistakable seal upon his forehead—when his feet, faltering under the weight of long-continued disease, were descending into the valley of the shadow,—even then his unconquerable spirit dragged his wasted and enfeebled body to the scene of his former labors, and he laid on the altar of his life's work the last remnants of his fading strength.

Such a life, spent in the pursuit of noble aims, in steadfast loyalty to the right, in lofty self-sacrifice for the good of others, cannot be bound in the chains of the grave; its light shines far into the distant future; its influence and power live in ever-widening circles: such a life is as immortal as the immortal souls that are influenced by it.

> "No life can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife,
> And all life not be purer and stronger thereby!"

Let the life and work of our departed friend, shining like a star in the firmament of the past, living still though he has passed away, sounding in clear tones above his grave though his pale lips lie silent beneath, declare to us that a noble life is one spent in the pursuit of lofty things, that a noble soul in the eyes of God is one that cherishes high ideals of Christian character, that spends its time and energies in generous self-sacrifice for the good of others, in unfaltering loyalty to truth and honor, and steadfast devotion to a noble vocation.

Is our friend and associate really dead? Is he, whom one year ago we loved and honored as the embodiment of Christian manhood, really shut up in those cold walls of clay? Ah! no! "Though hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain." "To live in hearts we leave behind, is not to die." Death never comes to souls like his. He yet lives in his influence for good—lives in the souls that he has led to a happy and honored manhood, in the minds that he has awakened to a life and activity that shall never die, in the lives which he has rescued from ignorance and degradation and imbued with a high and noble purpose, in the circles of love and friendship which were cheered and brightened by his genial, happy spirit, and cordial sympathetic heart. He still lives in the scores of young men just entering into active manhood, from whose lives are reflected the light of his high-souled honor and the spotless sheen of his unsullied character.

As we look back over the shining record of his noble life, how many pictures round which memory loves to linger shine through the gathering mist of our saddened eyes! The youthful student with vigorous mind and unflagging zeal pressing onward in the pursuit of knowledge till he stands foremost among his associates; the dashing cavalryman, whose ringing shout and shining sword are always where steel meets steel in the forefront of the battle; the energetic, high-souled teacher, at the head of his youthful adherents waging a nobler warfare than ever stained with a brother's blood the battle-fields of earth; the public-spirited citizen, prompt to advance the interests of the commonwealth at any sacrifice of personal convenience; the tender and loving husband and father; the faithful and affectionate friend, whose spotless character and chivalric sense of honor invited implicit trust; and shining far above all with more than earthly light, the devoted, zealous Christian, who, through a long time of loving service walked hand in hand with his Redeemer and trod the skyward path that leads to the throne of God.

It is by such lives as these that our earth is ennobled. When an immortal soul thus consecrates itself to God and catches a beam from the light-fountain of his inexhaustible radiance, then indeed is the divinest of all miracles enacted, and this little earth

of ours, as it rolls among the countless stars, bears in its bosom a spark of the celestial fire that emanates from Deity himself. Brighter than any gleam of earthly gold; more splendid than any gaudy trappings of earthly fame and power, shines the record of a life so spent. What glittering sheaves of good deeds do the years of the past bring to lay upon his grave! What a throng of prayers and benedictions from grateful hearts follow him to his last resting-place! What hallowed memories of friend, counselor, teacher, guide, husband, father, characterized his name and weave garlands of immortal flowers to decorate his tomb! He has erected his monument in the hearts of those who knew and loved him, in the lives that were led into nobler and purer manhood by his influence and example. Such monuments defy the corroding touch of time. Higher than sculptured shafts of stone, brighter than the gleam of marble statues, more enduring than granite pile or brazen temple, richer and more splendid than turreted cathedral or gilded mausoleum; for they are built of immortal souls, the fairest and most precious of all the Creator's handiwork.

Farewell, thou noble and chivalrous spirit, thou mirror of manly honor and patriotic devotion, thou soul of candor and pure interested friendship! Thine hours on earth were not spent in luxurious ease, or freedom from care and thought. Thy mission was to brighten, to elevate, to purify; to implant new views of life and its solemn duties; to rouse immortal minds from the sleep of ignorance to higher planes of thought and wider spheres of activity. Thy toil is over, thy mission ended, thy life-work performed. Thou hast entered into the rest prepared from eternity for souls like thine. No jarring clash of conflicting interests is there, no chilling contact of unsympathetic souls, no hand of death smiting into the dust the idols of the heart, no infirmities of disease to rack the wasting body and eat short all fond hopes and cherished plans. Thou art at rest, while we are yet toiling in the dust and heat of the highway and lift our longing eyes to the celestial heights thou now hast trod. In the presence of God and the companionship of the angelic host, amid the throng of the redeemed and glorified, we leave thee. Once more, farewell!

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